

Next Steps: How we plan to better understand the wetland losses identified in the recent Delaware Wetlands Status and Changes Report 1992 to 2007.

The February 2012 release of the report “Delaware Wetlands: Status and Changes from 1992 to 2007” is an assessment of the wetland resource statewide. It is a landscape level analysis based on aerial photo interpretation of where wetlands are located on the landscape while assessing the services these wetlands provide and how they have changed from 1992 to 2007. The information used for this analysis includes hydric soils from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Survey, elevation, streams and rivers, past wetland mapping, and vegetation cover on the ground. The most current data available was used to produce these new wetland maps and the resulting wetland assessment report.

Losses of vegetated wetlands during this time period were higher than expected at almost 3,900 acres. Permitted losses from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers databases for the same time period show only hundreds of acres lost. This inconsistency deserves immediate attention to understand the characteristics and changes occurring to wetlands on the landscape. Wetland losses and changes can be attributed to permitted losses, wetlands being delineated as upland, or unpermitted loss. On the ground delineations are the most accurate method of determining wetland boundaries. In headwater areas, wetlands are difficult to identify through aerial photography and can even prove difficult during ground level delineation. DNREC recognizes that some of the wetland losses within this report may not be determined to be wetlands when delineated on the ground – possibly as much as 30%.

DNREC has already initiated communications with the Corps, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Resource Conservation Service to unveil more specific ground-level data on wetland loss and changes to the landscape. DNREC anticipates communication with local governments and wetland consultants to gather additional information on the ground-level analysis. We see this as a great opportunity to further understand how land use decisions are affecting wetlands in the state.

Additionally, DNREC is working to better understand the critical natural services that wetlands provide to the citizens of Delaware and within this report 11 services are evaluated. All wetlands provide important services such as purifying our waters, flood protection, providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and recreation opportunities. Wetland services are critical to the quality of life in Delaware, and DNREC is concerned that continued loss will further diminish these services potentially resulting in consequences to the State’s economy.

The complete report and related details are available on the Delaware Wetlands site at the link below:
<http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/Admin/DelawareWetlands/Pages/DelawareWetlandsStatusandTrends.aspx>

